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Reserve

RURAL ELECTRIFICATION ADMINISTRATION

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SUGGESTIONS AS AN AID TO BETTER CORRESPONDENCE

NOTE: This material was prepared by Vincent D. Nicholson for a brief course of study by certain members of REA.

The sample letters are taken from actual REA correspondence with certain changes to make more vivid the desired illustration of typical faults.

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INTRODUCTION

The Administrator has indicated a desire for improvement in REA correspondence and inter-office memoranda. These two different types of writing have certain things in common and both involve many of the matters which we shall consider in our study.

The value of this study will probably consist in reducing to organized form a few principles which most of us know in a vague way, but which receive inadequate attention at the time of actual dictation. My contribution grows out of my own working experience rather than any special research.

The subject is one of great importance to the organization which we serve and to each of us personally. Facility in letter-writing brings many satisfactions that run beyond the primary purpose of increased business utility. A good business letter is a work of art, and its utility depends upon its artistic quality. Few can be great artists but all of us can improve our product by conscious effort. Effective expression is no guarantee of business success, but few persons have succeeded in business administration without the ability to say effectively what they know.

The special importance of the subject for REA grows out of the fact that most of our dealings with people are by way of correspondence. Some of our problems are unique. We are engaged in

an enterprise that is unprecedented in the history of Government and that is wholly new in the business experience of most of the people with whom we deal. Each State presents widely different problems in development, law and public relations. There is considerable uniformity throughout the country in matters of engineering, construction, utilization, accounting and project management, but the varied character of our correspondents and the differences in local situations create letter-writing problems for all units of REA. Of special difficulty are the problems growing out of opposition to some of the things we want to do and frequent conflict between the selfish interests of individuals who seek to profit by our program and the broad social purposes that we seek to promote.

A THOROUGH KNOWLEDGE OF THE SUBJECT

The first requisite in writing a good letter is a thorough knowledge of the subject. It is hopeless to expect any adequate response from the reader if the writer's understanding is confused or incomplete. I recently started to write a letter for the Administrator to sign, dealing with a mixed question of law and REA policy and local policy on the part of one of our borrowers. It had to do with the necessity for an engineer to be licensed under an Iowa statute and our willingness to approve an unlicensed engineer. There was quite a little history lying back of the immediate question and a sense of irritation on the part of our correspondent. I got about half way through and found that I did not have a sufficient knowledge of the law or the past history of the matter. I postponed my answer and took another day. I obtained a careful memorandum on the legal question from one of our attorneys and precise information from the Chief Engineer on the past history. Then in less time than that in which I had floundered around the day before I wrote a letter which satisfied me.

There is a temptation to write letters prematurely because we like to get things off our desks. Before one begins to write a letter or a memorandum he should know all about the subject that is

necessary for the purpose of disposing of the matter. It may mean getting information from other people or it may mean a more critical examination of one's own files.

Next, I suggest that we be more diligent in organizing the facts and analyzing the problem. Obtaining a broad perspective of the letter or the memorandum saves time in the long run. It is impossible to write a good letter on a complicated subject without taking a good deal of time. Most of this time should be taken before beginning to dictate. The non-observance of this rule has several bad results. We fumble around; the finished product lacks clarity or completeness; and we take up too much of the stenographer's time, either during dictation or in rewriting the letter after the first inadequate production has been revised. There is difference of opinion as to a general practice of hastily prepared rough drafts. It is my experience that this practice should be kept to a minimum of highly important letters, in order to save time and to avoid habits of carelessness and laziness.

An adequate knowledge of the subject has another result that is more intangible but more valuable. Creative achievement in any field requires a release of spirit that comes only from a sense of ease and assurance. This assurance is impossible unless one feels a sense of mastery of the subject. A person who seems stupid and inarticulate in a group will become vivid and articulate if the dis-

cussion turns to a subject with which he is intimately familiar. An uneducated person with a poor vocabulary can make a speech that will move a large audience, if the subject is one in which he feels a sense of mastery.

In every field of art, achievement comes by way of the intuitive processes which draw subconsciously upon an accumulated body of experience. This spontaneity and release of spirit is possible only when one feels thoroughly at home in the work at hand. Nothing so dries up the wells of creative effort as a sense of inadequacy. When I feel mastery of a subject I produce a memorandum, or a letter, or a brief of which I am not ashamed. My thoughts flow freely and the document develops as it should. When I try to dictate something with inadequate preparation I am licked from the start. I feel a constant sense of inadequacy and I lack that release of mind and feeling which is essential to creative work. If I were asked to evaluate the requisites of a good letter or memorandum, I would place at the head of the list a thorough and organized knowledge of the subject matter.

Excerpt from a Letter Showing
Inadequate Preparation

". . . It is felt advisable for the time being to allow on a yearly basis from \$6 to \$8 a connected customer for management expense. This varies in proportion to the density of users and the section of the country. It is suggested that you fill out Form MF30, Estimated Monthly Average Income and Expense During Construction Period..

"To arrive at the estimated income multiply the number of customers you expect to connect during the first six months of line operation by a figure between \$6 and \$8 (which represents an estimated amount for management expenses which can be expected yearly for each consumer).

"The project supervisor's salary is chargeable to construction expense. The project manager's salary must necessarily come from revenue produced and should be limited accordingly. . . . "

Comments

The whole of this letter confused two separate matters-- management during construction and management of the completed project. It would seem better to cover two such matters in separate letters. If combined in one letter, the two should be clearly differentiated. Other portions of the letter, not quoted above, dealt with the qualifications and employment of the two types of manager. When so many matters are included in one letter, there is special need for careful preparation.

In the first paragraph, the variables affecting management

expense should be stated more specifically. The second paragraph contains a confusion of thought as to income and outgo. The REA Form MF30, despite its title, is adapted only to the operation of an energized line and should not be used for the construction period.

This is a type of letter, dealing with a number of detailed matters, which justifies a written outline. See page 18 for a suggested outline of the whole letter from which this excerpt was taken.

Suggested Revision

" . . . As a guide to your immediate action with reference to management during construction, we enclose two copies of our Form ____, on one of which we have indicated a suggested break-down of such expense for your project. Please return to us the other copy, after filling in your own estimates based upon your knowledge of your particular requirements. We shall then correspond with you further by way of arriving at a definite understanding for the purpose of quick clearance of your later requisitions for funds.

"Our suggested breakdown is based upon our experience under average conditions. We have attempted to adjust our estimates to the special needs of your project so far as they are within our knowledge. You may wish to inform us of special problems pertaining to your project in such matters as the following: salary requirements of the supervisor whom you wish to employ; extent of dealings with your prospective customers concerning wiring and plumbing loans; ease or difficulty in securing easements; negotiations concerning wholesale energy; maintenance of interest among your members; and the handling of possible opposition to your plans from any source. . . "

A CLEAR CONCEPT OF THE PURPOSE OF THE LETTER

Every letter or memorandum has a purpose. It may be the spurious purpose of getting the matter off one's desk or off one's chest. It may be a desire to display the erudition of the writer or to release pent-up emotion. The valid purpose, however - that for which we are employed - is to produce in the mind of the reader a certain feeling or to evoke from the reader a certain action.

Some REA letters are very simple; others are highly technical; still others are complicated by delicate situations. The letter may convey information; it may request information; it may make suggestions; it may give instructions; it may attempt to clear misunderstandings; it may seek to persuade or convince. Whatever the subject matter, I think we will agree that there is a central, controlling purpose in every letter. As a result of our effort we want something to happen at the other end. It may be a very simple thing or it may be a complicated series of things. The thing that we want to happen may involve chiefly the psychology of the reader or may involve a series of important acts, not only on his part but on the part of his associates. The purpose of the letter is to be of maximum assistance in causing that thing, or that series of things, to happen.

For example, a farmer with no experience in developing an electric system may be requested to furnish more adequate data in

support of a loan application. An engineer who has manhandled the preparation of plans and specifications may require a special letter of additional instructions. In writing such letters none of us has difficulty with the proper conscious purpose. We know that we desire a particular course of action from the particular reader. It is a possible subconscious purpose that needs to be watched; there is the temptation for the writer to display his superior knowledge as a satisfaction to his ego.

I may be writing a very able attorney on a highly complicated legal question about which we have disagreed. I have the problem of convincing this man, - not obtaining a certain release of spirit in holding up my end of the question. He may emphasize issues which I deem unimportant or irrelevant but I must meet him in the avenue of his thought before I can hope to bring his mind to my position. It happens too often that an answering letter, even though admirable in structure and style, fails to be a real answer, because it doesn't go out to meet the reader. We may feel that the reader is wandering far afield in error and ignorance, but we must go to him where he is. Shouting at him from a distance to come over to the writer's position is not likely to be effective.

Sample of Poor Letter Showing
Lack of Clear Purpose

"I write to acknowledge your letter of January 16th. We are glad to have this information.

"You are correct in your desire to limit your project to lines that are economically feasible as indicated by your survey. On the other hand we desire that the project as originally approved be as large as possible in order to prevent the necessity for considering later applications for additions. I doubt whether we can approve the project as submitted.

"It may be desirable for your project to be combined with that in _____ County for which an application is now pending. This might help to solve the problem of wholesale energy mentioned in your letter. We might be willing to lend funds for a generating plant if the project were large enough.

"If we can be of any further assistance in helping you to enlarge your project as suggested please let us know."

Comments

This letter is ill adapted to the desired result of definite action by the applicants, in enlarging their own project or combining with another, or both. The letter smacks too much of a purpose merely to get rid of the matter for the time being. It is not sufficiently definite or complete.

Suggested Revision

"We are in complete agreement, of course, with the policy of limiting your project to territory where there is strong assurance of connecting an adequate number of customers. You indicate, however, in your letter of

January 16 that further surveys may make possible an enlargement of the project at some future date. These surveys should be made now, in order to strengthen your pending application.

"The success of your proposed enterprise will depend partly upon its size. In order to make possible a competent manager, an adequate maintenance crew, and proper provision for certain other items of general expense, a project normally should be twice the size of that which you have submitted. The larger the project, the more easily solved is the problem of wholesale energy, discussed in your last letter. There would be a better prospect for a low rate if energy is purchased, and if an adequate rate cannot be obtained we would be willing to consider a loan for a generating plant for a project of sufficient size. We desire strongly to assist the farmers of your county in securing electricity, but we would not be justified in approving your application in its present form.

"In addition to a prompt survey of all remaining and available territory in your own county we suggest your immediate consideration of the following proposal. You may find it possible and advisable to combine your project with that in _____ County for which a loan application is also pending. We are today suggesting this possible combination to Mr. _____, of _____, who is Chairman of the Committee sponsoring that project. The proper course of procedure would be an early meeting of your two committees. Such a meeting might open up plans for a stronger and more promising cooperative enterprise, of increased advantage to the farmers in both counties. The latter would seem to merit a conference between you and Mr. _____ before the end of this week."

VISUALIZING THE READER

A determination of the essential purpose of a letter leads to the next step in the writer's preparation--a visualization of the reader. The technique of the "you attitude" has become a truism in business correspondence. Our correspondents vary widely in a number of respects -- in education, in knowledge of the REA program generally, in special knowledge of the particular matter and in their interest and attitudes. We correspond with farmers who know nothing about the technical problems involved in constructing and owning an electric line. We deal with attorneys and engineers who do have this technical knowledge. Some of our readers are sympathetic to our program generally; some are highly critical. Some are deeply interested in the particular subject at hand; some are indifferent. The matter of visualizing the person at the other end involves taking into account all of these factors. A letter on the same subject might need to be written in four different ways to four different persons. It is difficult but it is possible to place one's self in the mental and emotional shoes of the reader. This principal of the "you attitude" is a thread that will run through all of our study.

Sample of Letter in which the Reader
is Not Adequately Visualized

"We have examined the proposals for the distribution system on the above project, found them to be unsatisfactory, hence they are disapproved.

"In our opinion the amounts of the bids are so far in excess of the sum we have agreed to loan for this project that we recommend that the project be revamped to be constructed on a Star system, instead of a Delta, whereby single phase construction can be used in place of considerable three phase and still keep within the limitations of good regulation.

"We also recommend that the transformer sizes be decreased as we believe that the load is overestimated.

"We shall be glad to assist in the reworking of this project in order that the same may be resubmitted in a form consistent with our requirements."

Comments

This letter does not express the "you attitude". Every paragraph begins with "we" or "our", and the emphasis is upon REA requirements rather than upon the needs and interests of the borrower. Even though compliance with our wishes is the purpose of the letter, the accomplishment of this purpose must be through the medium of this particular reader and his associates. An appeal to his self-interest should be made.

This letter was addressed to the farmer-president of a co-operative. The technical matters, therefore, should be omitted and

covered in a letter to the project engineer. The letter is not sufficiently definite and lacks completeness. It does not push the matter along very far. If the technical matters involved in a re-vamping of the project should be covered in this letter, they should be outlined in greater detail rather than postponed to the indefinite future.

The letter illustrates other common errors, such as the use of the word "loan" as a verb, the stilted use of the phrase "the same", poor paragraph structure, and an ungrammatical first sentence. The second sentence lacks conciseness and the reference to "good regulation" is not likely to be clear to the reader.

Suggested Revision

"The amounts of the bids submitted for the construction of your project present a problem which doubtless has been claiming the attention of your directors and your engineer. As you know, each of these bids is in excess of the amount of the loan for which you applied and which we approved. We have made a careful re-examination of the engineering and financial details of your project and the following suggestions may assist you in your further plans.

"In order to assure a successful enterprise, it would seem that your corporation should assume no greater burden of indebtedness than the sum represented by the loan as now approved. The solution of the problem, therefore, should be by way of reducing the cost rather than by an increase in the amount of the loan. It is our opinion, based upon our general experience and upon our examination of the plans for your distribution system, that this

cost can be reduced without any impairment of efficiency or any loss of anticipated revenue. Detailed suggestions as to these changes in your plans and specifications are being forwarded today to your engineer.

"In order that these necessary further steps may move along as rapidly as possible, we suggest that you issue an immediate call for a special meeting of your Board of Directors at which this letter can be read and the matter can be discussed with your engineer. Your prospective customers should then be advised by mail or in some other appropriate manner that the engineering plans are being changed so that the entire project can be quickly constructed at the desired low cost, within the amount of the approved loan. In normal course, a period of _____ weeks' time should be sufficient for the revision of the plans by your engineer, their approval by us, the award of the contract, and the beginning of construction."

AN OUTLINE OF THE LETTER OR MEMORANDUM

The last step in preparation for the act of writing is the making of an outline of the subject matter. In most cases this will be a mental outline. For long and complicated writings it is helpful to make an outline on paper. Anyone who has not had a long experience in dictation will probably find it helpful to map out in advance the framework of any important letter of more than a few lines. Even those of us who have had wide experience in dictating for hours at a time make too little use of the simple device of a short written outline for highly important letters.

Such an outline, properly constructed, has several functions. In the first place it centers attention upon the need for one central idea and helps to avoid the inclusion of several unrelated subjects in one letter. A further function is to arrange in logical sequence the several parts of this central idea. The outline of a long and complicated letter might have three or four main divisions and a number of subdivisions. Some letters are ruined, even though excellently expressed in language, because the sequence of ideas is wrong and the letter does not proceed smoothly from one thought to another.

Finally, a clear understanding - either in mind or on paper - of the general framework of a letter, enables the writer during dictation to focus attention upon the language used in filling out this framework. Good diction requires a certain spontaneity that is hampered if one's thought is preoccupied with the different mental task of organizing the ideas to be expressed. I venture to predict (based upon my own recent experiments) that anyone will find an easy and surprising improvement in the expression of ideas if the formulation and arrangement of the ideas for the entire letter has been carefully completed prior to dictation.

Suggested Written Outline for the Letter From Which
An Excerpt is Quoted on Page 6

(The sub-heads A, B and C should be separate paragraphs)

I. Need for a project supervisor during construction.

- A. Statement of the value to the project.
- B. Analysis of duties of such a position.
- C. Qualifications of the supervisor.
 - 1. Past experience.
 - 2. Technical abilities.
 - 3. Ability to work with a farmers' cooperative.

II. Comparison of this position with that of manager of the project when completed.

(Note: Query as to including this subject in this letter.)

- A. Duties and qualifications.
- B. Comparison of expense.
- C. Possibility that the "supervisor" may continue as "manager".

III. Suggestions as to procedure in obtaining a supervisor.

- A. Action by the Directors or by the organizing Committee.
 - 1. Form of Resolution to be adopted.
- B. Need for approval by REA.

IV. Management expense during construction.

- A. Explanation of Form _____.
 - 1. Our breakdown.
 - 2. Desired estimate from Borrower.
- B. Analysis of variable factors affecting a management budget.

V. Summary of immediate action desired from the reader with final emphasis upon resulting advantage to the project.

GENERAL TONE AND STYLE

Every letter has a general tone which should harmonize with its purpose and help to promote the response desired from the reader. A letter may be persuasive or coercive, friendly or antagonistic, conciliatory or controversial, dispassionate or over-earnest, forceful or weak. It may have life and warmth or it may be cold and dull. The qualities of tact, courtesy and sincerity may be evident in varying degrees.

The importance of "tone" varies with the purpose of the letter and with its importance. A large number of REA letters are merely informative. Many others carry simple instructions to interested and willing readers. Such letters have a light load to carry. They should be well-written and conform to the principles previously discussed; they should do credit to the writers and to REA. But they do not require much attention to the matter of tone.

We are concerned here with the relatively few letters which have a heavy assignment. It may be necessary to convert indifference into active interest. Doors stronger than indifference - irritation or antagonism - may bar effective entry to the reader's mind and feeling. Even with a friendly, interested reader, it may be necessary to change a strongly held opinion. Another class of highly important letters seeks difficult

action from the reader. The difficulty may arise from the nature of the matter at hand, such as a complicated set of instructions. In such cases the importance of tone is accentuated when the borrowers' representatives have failed to follow previous instructions. The special difficulty may be occasioned by a delicate local situation in which the desired action adversely affects some person or agency. A further type of important letter may supplement some special disability or disadvantage of the reader, such as inexperience or lack of cooperation from his associates.

In REA correspondence the following matters are typical of those which require special attention to tone and style: rejection of an application for a loan; suggestion that a project be revamped; request for further data involving considerable work, such as signed customer contracts; advice concerning the appointment of attorney, engineer or manager; disapproval of personnel appointments recommended by the project sponsors; important changes in plans and specifications; action that disappoints the borrower with respect to the manner of constructing the project, purchasing materials or accepting bids; statement of legal opinion or policy with which the reader is in disagreement; refusal to approve certain items as a part of the cost of the project; load-building suggestions intended for effective action rather than the borrowers' waste basket; instructions as to accounting and reports to REA; advice as to the manner of operating the completed line; relations between borrowers and

other agencies involving conflict of interests within the state or variance with REA policy; sharp division of local opinion or attitude on the part of directors or other representatives of our borrowers; answers to complaint letters.

The controlling purpose of such a letter may be a change in the reader's feeling; it may be an immediate act or a succession of acts. A single letter may involve both feeling and action with equal emphasis. In determining the proper tone of a "feeling" letter--one intended chiefly to change an attitude--the matter of visualizing the reader is of major importance. Transpose one's self into his situation; seek a sympathetic understanding of his problem. Try to feel, for the time, as he feels. Imagine the type of letter which the writer would consider effective, were the situation reversed. Estimate the strength of the reader's emotional resistance and determine not only the tone which should dominate the letter but also the degree of tone emphasis which is just enough--not too much, or too little. The appropriate tone may be argumentative, persuasive, conciliatory, forceful in language, firm in adherence to a given policy, unusually earnest or carefully dispassionate. "Tone emphasis" does not mean an emphatic letter; it means the degree of tone feeling which is appropriate and necessary to carry the particular load. The reader should not feel that the tone is over-done, but on the other hand an important letter should not be timid or feeble in its approach.

An "action" letter - one which seeks important action from the reader or his associates - should carry a feeling of action. The ideas should be "on the march". Words and phrases should be positive rather than negative. By a little special attention, most negative ideas can be transposed into a positive form of expression. Instead of saying "It will be unacceptable to us and disadvantageous to you to employ an inexperienced lawyer (or engineer or manager)", say instead "It will greatly expedite your project and will save money as well as time, to employ persons who are specially competent and experienced."

The most important requirement of a successful letter, designed to secure action from the reader, is an effective appeal to the reader's self-interest. The reader must be shown how he will profit by the action desired. The writer should marshal in his thinking, before beginning to write, all the features of his central idea which contribute reasonably to the self-interest of the reader. In sending these ideas upon their mission it is usually good tactics to avoid a direct frontal attack; a flank movement may avoid the subconscious resistance which is always raised against an invasion of one's ego. So far as possible, the reader should be made to feel that it is his own idea which evokes the response. Leave much to the reader's imagination; do not attempt to tell the whole story. Suggestion is often more effective than a completely developed argument.

Illustrative of the technique of suggestion and indirect approach is the manner of handling a desire on our part for the consoli-

dation of two or three projects. If the expression of our desire is too obvious and blunt, it may serve to accentuate feelings of local pride and self-interest running counter to our idea. It might be good strategy not even to mention the consolidation in the first letter dealing with the problem, but rather to outline the advantages to the farmers of a project large enough to be self-sustaining as a successful business unit. Having opened up the matter by an appeal to the self-interest of the proper persons, the idea of a consolidation of two or more adjacent projects might occur to certain of our readers as an idea of their own discovery.

Style is a more appropriate expression than tone for certain attributes of an effective letter. The style of a letter might be described as its architecture; the tone is its atmosphere. Without overstraining the distinction, it might be said that the architecture of a business letter should employ simple lines. There should not be much adornment, either in ideology or in diction. Figurative language (which has its place, perhaps, in this discussion of business correspondence) should seldom appear in the correspondence itself.

Although the choice of appropriate styles in REA correspondence is limited, there is room for discriminating variety, depending upon the subject matter and the reader. Some letters should have formal dignity; others should have something of a conversational style. The personal relation between the writer and the reader should not be emphasized as a general rule, but there are letters in which such emphasis is appropriate.

Some letters should be a solid block of technical instructions; some should be a closely knit body of argument. Others may be helped by a few light touches to relieve formality and rigidity.

Both in style and in tone all parts of a letter should have an essential harmony. It is usually better - certainly, easier, - to preserve the same style and tone throughout. If conciliation and sharp criticism are used in a single letter, they should be skilfully blended. Light personal touches should not be thrown in without regard for the principles of good architecture. In my work with REA I have received letters in which the attempt to plait my hair was too obvious and the effect upon me was opposite to that which was intended. This does not mean, necessarily, that I questioned the sincerity of the writer, but rather that the letter lacked an effective harmony. A compliment, an expression of congratulation or an appreciative reference to a luncheon or other personal association should be blended into the context and not be allowed to stand out as an obvious and awkward attempt to curry favor. Such references may well appear at the close of letters intended to influence attitude but they should not appear as afterthoughts.

Sample Letters Illustrating
Tone and Style

"I was surprised to receive your complaint of _____, concerning our requirement of certified copies of your articles of incorporation and your corporate resolutions.

"Please be advised that these requirements are the universal practice in important matters of corporate finance and must be insisted upon. We have had no such complaint from any attorney representing any other of our several hundred projects.

"You should not feel that we have any doubt as to the honesty or integrity of yourself or any of your associates. Our requirements in this regard are merely for the sake of customary and proper records in our files. It is always customary, according to the writer's experience, for a lender of funds to receive a copy of the articles of incorporation of the borrower, certified by the Secretary of State or similar officer, and copies of corporate resolutions certified by the actual signature of the secretary."

Comments

This letter is in reply to a sharp, sarcastic and wholly unjustified complaint from a project attorney. No useful purpose is served, however, by yielding to the natural temptation to reply in similar vein. The cold bluntness of this answer is not likely to pave the way for more effective dealings with this attorney in the future. The following suggested revision seeks to strike a note of conciliation, and yet maintain our position. The reasons for our requirements are set forth in an attempt to persuade, rather than coerce. The personal touch at the close seems appropriate in correspondence of this kind between members of the same profession.

Suggested Revision

"I hope you will feel that our request for certified copies of your articles of incorporation and resolutions does not represent the slightest unwillingness on our part to rely upon the verity and good faith of the officers of your corporation. This request was wholly a routine matter in conformity with our usual practice and with the practice to which all of us here have been accustomed in the field of private banking and private law practice. Legal customs vary, of course, between the different States, and practices which are wholly a matter of routine in one State may seem peculiar in another. In my own private law practice I suppose I have asked and have been asked for such certified copies hundreds of times.

"Our operations cover most of the States of the country and of course our procedures, for the sake of convenience, must be reasonably uniform. Our records often contain documents in preliminary and tentative form and we have found it helpful to have the final copies identified by signed certificates such as we have requested.

"I am extremely sorry that our procedures unwittingly caused misunderstanding in your mind. It is unfortunate that we have to carry on most of our dealings with local attorneys by correspondence. It would be very helpful if we could talk things over occasionally across a desk, but since this is impossible I hope that this letter may serve somewhat as a substitute. When you are in Washington, please arrange to drop in and see me, even though there is no matter of official business which requires discussion."

* * * * *

The letter on page 10 is illustrative of another problem in tone and style. The purpose is to obtain certain specific action from the reader by way of enlargement of the project, but it is not a good "action letter". The suggested revision seeks to keep the

reader's interest and thought "on the move". Note the emphasis in this revision upon the self-interest of the reader and the frequent references to specific and progressive action desired from him and his associates.

* * * * *

See also the letter on page 13 which contains too much of the "we attitude". In the suggested revision, note the attempt to ease the local disappointment occasioned by our rejection of the bids and the blending of each suggestion with an appeal to the self-interest of the reader and his associates.

QUALITIES OF TACT, COURTESY AND SINCERITY

There are certain qualities which should characterize every letter, regardless of the subject-matter or the tone. There are occasions when a letter must be sharply critical of an attitude or course of action of the reader. Vigor and firmness may be more appropriate than conciliation or deference. Every letter, however, should be written with tact. This matter of tact does not lend itself easily to a formulation of rules. We are always conscious of the presence or absence of tact on the part of those with whom we deal; we may not know just how or why. The Golden Rule is perhaps the best one; the writer should frame the kind of letter which he would like to receive. In this part of our discussion we are concerned, of course, with the spirit of the letter - not with its content. The idea may be highly unwelcome, but the manner of its expression should diminish rather than increase the emotional resistance of the reader. The writer should first put in order the house of his own emotions. No letter should be written in anger or irritation. A business letter seldom requires fervor, but proper earnestness can be achieved in dispassionate expression. Sarcasm is occasionally evident in incoming REA correspondence; the impulse to reply in similar vein is strong.

for me to yield to the impulse is to descend to my correspondent's ineffective method. He has accomplished nothing with me except to make me less spontaneous and ready in any attempt to give him what he wants. My reply should depend upon the results which I wish to accomplish with him. If he and his interests are a closed chapter and of no further use to REA, it is better to ignore his letter rather than allow it to get me into bad correspondence habits. If, as is usually the case, we want something further from him, my letter should pave the way for a renewal of effective cooperation. There is no loss of self-respect for me personally or for REA if my attitude of tact is ultimately successful in dominating the relationship.

Courtesy is also an indispensable requisite. The reader's personality should be respected. If I were asked to reduce this somewhat elusive quality of courtesy to a single didactic rule, I would say that it is a matter of sympathetic and interested understanding of the reader's position and problem. Some of us are instinctively interested in other people; some of us require more conscious attention to the reaction of our own attitude in the feeling of others. "Smile and a man smiles back". In terms of sheer business utility, the success of a letter may be in direct proportion to the courtesy of its tone.

Sincerity is essential in carrying conviction to the reader.

If the feeling of courtesy is forced or mechanical, the reaction upon the reader will be negative. The "you attitude" in a letter is not essentially a matter of syntax or mechanical forms of expression. The letter must ring true to the quality of sincerity and this is possible only when the writer's interest in the reader and his problems is honest. Such an honest interest is often difficult. One's first impulse in meeting a tough situation - particularly in answering a complaint or expressing criticism of a reader's conduct - is a release of one's own emotional tension. But that is not what we are employed to do. Our business duty is to obtain a result from the reader that will further the interests of REA. It is not necessary for the writer to apply an anaesthetic to the natural desire to dominate; it is possible to sublimate this desire into a higher level of dealing and a more effective choice of methods.

Illustrative Material

As illustrative of the problem of tact, courtesy and sincerity see the letter on page 25. The suggested revision of this letter is intended to convey to the reader an honest, sincere interest in his side of the misunderstanding. It seeks to be conciliatory without being "mushy", tactful without yielding our position. Its purpose is to take command of the situation, not by coercion but by guiding the relationship with this reader into an effective cooperation.

* * * *

In the letter on page 13, giving notice of a rejection of bids, the opening paragraph is too blunt. One of the finest arts in human relationships, conspicuous in the success of great politicians, is the ability to say "no" or administer a criticism, and yet preserve good feeling. I have known persons who always sent me away from a conference feeling better, even though I did not get what I wanted. It is good business and good politics to seek this ideal in correspondence. Such negative, unwelcome words as "unsatisfactory", "disapproved", "impossible", "erroneous", should be balanced with expressions that show respect for the reader's ego and tend to preserve his good feeling.

GENERAL STRUCTURE

The proper structure of a letter involves, chiefly, matters of syntax and rhetoric which are beyond the scope of this study. I shall refer merely to a few simple rules which might be kept in the focus of one's attention during the preparation of a letter.

Each letter should have one central idea. If it is necessary, during a single period of dictation, to address one person on several unrelated subjects, each subject, however, unimportant, should be handled in a separate letter. In important matters, this practice is essential for the sake of an effective letter. In unimportant matters it is desirable for the sake of proper filing and future reference.

The paragraph structure should correspond with the logical breaks in the thought. We have already discussed the value of an initial outline (often in written form) breaking up the central idea into its component parts and arranging these parts in logical sequence. Each paragraph should be a unit in itself and should develop one of these principal parts of the central idea of the letter. A paragraph should present a solid block of thought in which the several sentences are fitted together nicely. If a necessary sentence does not fit and sticks out awkwardly, it belongs in another paragraph. Variety in the length of paragraphs is proper but the degree of effective variation is not so great as is true of sentence structure. Unusual

length and unusual shortness should be avoided. Good paragraph structure requires not only the exclusion of irrelevant matter, but also the inclusion in each paragraph of all that is necessary to complete its special task.

The thought should proceed smoothly from one sentence to another and from each paragraph to the succeeding one. Do not ask the reader to wander around in a labyrinth, not knowing exactly where he is being led. It is essential, not only that the ideas should be arranged in logical sequence, but also that this sequence should be followed easily by the reader. Each paragraph and each sentence should be tied in with the preceding one. Sometimes the thought flows so smoothly that no mechanical connecting devices are necessary. Most of us, however, should make much more frequent use of connecting words that bridge the gaps between sentences and paragraphs. Such words as the following are of great assistance to the reader: "however", "further", "furthermore", "nevertheless", "moreover", "therefore", "also", "same", "thus", "such", "similarly", "on the other hand", "another", "besides", "the following", "the foregoing". Some connecting words are appropriate only in letters involving technical subject-matter, and formal style; others are particularly adapted to a free and easy style. The adjective pronouns, "this", "that", "these" and "those" are usually preferable to more formal expressions such as "above", "foregoing", "above-mentioned", "hereinbefore designated". Instead of the phrase "the above project", so

generally used in REA correspondence, the simple phrase, "this project" would be more appropriate in most letters. A good letter should be a smooth, straight and well-bridged highway, carrying the reader's thought with ease.

The first and last sentences of a paragraph are of special importance. The opening sentence should introduce the central idea in such manner as to give the reader an immediate understanding of what to expect from the paragraph as a whole. Most persons are visual-minded and the extent to which the writer's thought is transferred to the mind of the reader is often dependent upon the mechanical arrangement of the ideas. The sole purpose of paragraph structure is to break up the thought as a mechanical aid to the reader. This purpose is partially defeated if the reader is kept in uncertainty through half of a paragraph as to its controlling idea. The last sentence should end on a strong note. Paragraphs are too often permitted to fizzle out weakly. Every important letter should have a few highlights in order to quicken and sustain the reader's interest. This special emphasis is usually most effective when applied at the breaks in the thought, represented by the transition from one paragraph to another. Each new paragraph places upon the reader the burden of assimilating a new idea and this burden is assumed more readily when the close of the preceding paragraph has stimulated the reader's imagination and interest.

Sample of Poor Structure in the Letter as a Whole
and in Each Paragraph

"We have your letter of March 31 asking advice as to specifications on poles together with prices and addresses of contractors purchasing poles.

"At the present time it is required that all poles used on REA projects be treated. The specifications for the poles to be used on any project are contained in the plans and specifications prepared by the project engineer for that project, although in general the specifications for poles used and those which we recommend are those of the American Standard Association. I have no doubt that you are familiar with the specifications of this Association.

"The specifications for the treatment follow very closely the recommendations of the recommended specifications published by the American Wood Preservers Association.

"We are enclosing a list of contractors upon which is indicated the names of contractors who have bid upon REA projects and those who have received contracts.

"Plans and specifications are sent out by the project engineer, consequently, this office has no information concerning the bids until after the bids have been received. Consequently, it will be impossible for us to give you information about prospective bidders other than the above list.

"It is also impracticable for us to give you detailed specifications for particular projects, since this would involve an undue amount of detail in assembling this information from our project records."

Comments

The thought of this letter jumps back and forth between the two matters of specifications for poles and names of contractors. The third and last paragraphs should be combined with the second.

The opening sentence of the second paragraph does not introduce the central idea which follows. The second sentence of this paragraph contains too much material. The closing sentence is weak and unnecessary.

Most of the paragraphs are too short. The letter as a whole creates a sense of confusion. A letter dealing with so simple a subject-matter should not require rereading.

Suggested Revision

"We are glad to inform you, so far as practicable, of the specifications on poles for REA projects, as requested in your letter of March 31. In general, the specifications contained in approved contracts are those of the American Standard Association. If you desire specific information as to a given project, we suggest that you write the contractor. This would seem to satisfy your needs and would relieve us of the very considerable burden of compiling the information from our records.

"It is our present policy to require that all poles used on REA projects be treated. The specifications for treatment conform closely in most cases to those published by the American Wood Preservers Association.

"We enclose the names and addresses of all contractors who have bid upon REA projects so far as we know of them. On this list we have indicated those who have been awarded contracts and a designation

by state and county of the projects served by each. It is not possible to give you this information with respect to projects on which bids are now pending, since the correspondence with prospective bidders is conducted by the engineers employed by our borrowers. We shall be glad to assist with such further information as you may desire, within limits that are appropriate and practicable."

* * * *

See also the letter on page 13 dealing with a rejection of bids, for an example of poor structure. Note that the suggested revision of this letter seeks to accomplish the following improvements: construction of each paragraph around a central idea, active opening sentences introducing these ideas, and closing sentences that sustain the reader's interest and keep the thought moving along. Note the several ways in which the sentences and paragraphs are connected, both by way of logical sequence of thought and by way of connecting devices when necessary. The last sentence of the first paragraph introduces the next. The first sentence of the third paragraph ties in the preceding general suggestions with a specific reference as to the next step in accomplishing these suggestions. Use is made of such connecting words as "these", "this", "following", "therefore", "further", "then".

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE OPENING AND ENDING OF A LETTER

What has been said concerning the opening and ending of a paragraph applies with even more force to the letter as a whole. Special attention should be given to the opening paragraph and particularly to the opening sentence. Remember that this is the introduction of your idea to the reader. First impressions are lasting and important. A pre-disposition is created by the introductory words. If this is favorable to the writer's purpose, the task of the remainder of the letter is more easy.

The first sentence should be active; should get ahead with the subject. It is weak and ineffective to begin with statements such as these:

"Your letter of _____ received," "I wish to acknowledge your letter of _____. "

Do not use most of the opening sentence to give a condensed recital of the letter that is being answered. This is dead material; it carries the

thought backward instead of forward. The opening paragraph should, of course, identify the letter that is being answered. It may also, without

loss of freshness and power, refer succinctly to the subject-matter of such prior letter. Sometimes this can better be done in the second sentence.

For example, the following opening sentence is weak and otherwise objectionable: "Answering your letter of _____, requesting that we

send an attorney to assist you in the organization of your corporation. I

am writing to advise you that I am sending our Mr. John Smith for this purpose."

It would be much more effective to say: "Mr. John Smith of our Legal

staff will be in _____ next Monday, May 2nd. He will be prepared to assist you in the organization of your corporation as requested in your letter of _____".

When the latter has the difficult task of overcoming indifference, irritation or opposition, the opening sentence requires unusual care. It should make definite progress in getting beyond the outer ramparts of the reader's resistance. It should go along with the reader's thought and feeling. It should contain a statement which at the best will create pleasure, and at the worst will avoid a sense of displeasure. It should arouse interest and evoke agreement. In answering a complaint, never use the word "complaint" or its equivalent. Avoid all provocative, controversial words and phrases.

In letters which seek action the important strategy of an appeal to the reader's self-interest should usually begin with the opening sentence. This appeal is the key-note of an effective letter. Until this key-note is struck the mind of the reader is not likely to fall into marching line with the mind of the writer. Until this happens the letter merely marks time and the important opening paragraph should not be so wasted.

The last paragraph and the last sentence also merit special attention. The letter should end on a strong note. The last paragraph should be more than a tag-end. It should emphasize the central idea of the letter and should contain specific reference to the chief result

desired from the reader. It may introduce a new idea and be the last step in the development of the thought, or it may be a short, forceful summary of the central idea of the letter.

Remember that the last sentence is your last contact with the reader prior to the result which you desire from him. If action is desired, end with a note of action. It is sometimes effective to be quite specific as to the first step which you wish him to take immediately. Participial endings are particularly bad. Do not let the force of your letter fizzle out by such expressions as: "Awaiting your reply", "Regretting that we are forced to take this action", "Thanking you in advance for the information requested".

It is impracticable to give studious care to each sentence in a letter. It is highly worth while, however, to give special attention to the opening and the ending. Each should please the reader, appeal to his self-interest, and make a carefully planned contribution to the central purpose of the letter.

Samples of Ineffective Openings

The letters on pages 10 and 35 illustrate weak opening paragraphs containing mere acknowledgements or descriptions of the letters being answered. The suggested revisions attempt to open with live matter that makes definite progress. It is sought to get the letters off to a good start by statements which appeal to the interest of the reader.

* * * * *

Sample of Good Ending

In the revised letter on page 10, the closing sentence seeks to swing the reader's thought into action by a specific suggestion as the next immediate step in a proposed enlargement of the project. Note that an appeal to the self-respect of the reader and his associates is carried on into the closing paragraph. The dominant note of the entire paragraph is one of action, since the purpose is to obtain action on a matter which is introduced to the reader for the first time.

DICTION

Words are the raw materials of a letter. The larger one's store of these materials, the greater one's facility in constructing an excellent product. Everyone has three vocabularies which might be represented by three concentric circles of different sizes. The largest circle is one's reading vocabulary, which has little significance for our present purpose.

Very much smaller is the circle which includes all the words which one can conveniently use in writing or speaking, by means of care and deliberation. An enlargement of this circle must come chiefly from a wide reading of good literature. Of the more than 400,000 words in a standard unabridged dictionary, the estimates of the number of words used in writing and speaking by persons of average college education or its equivalent, range from 10,000 to 20,000.

The smallest circle is one's usual working vocabulary. Our problem is concerned chiefly with this third circle, and particularly with the segment of that circle which represents our ~~REA~~ correspondence. Some experts have estimated that 2,000 words make up the vocabulary usually employed in business correspondence.

The first task in the improvement of diction is not so much an enlargement of one's total writing vocabulary, as an increase in the ease and facility with which one uses his presently available vocabulary.

It is partly a matter of the time consumed in searching for the right word. With long, painstaking deliberation each of us could greatly improve the richness of the word material we choose for our letters. Such great length of time is impracticable.

The following practical techniques are suggested as well worth the time and effort:

(a) Just as every letter has a central idea and a number of component key ideas, so every letter has a few key words which must carry the main stream of thought. It is probable that these words justify more discriminating thought than most of us give to them. Take reasonable time to consider the precise shade of meaning one desires to convey and select from a number of synonyms the word which most aptly fits this meaning.

(b) Read over at convenient times, the copies of one's own letters. Pick out the words that could be improved upon; words that fail to convey the precise shade of intended meaning; important words that are stilted or colorless. Rewrite, merely for practice, the letter - or portions of it - using words that have more richness and better adaptation to the thought.

(c) Select from one's past correspondence important words which occur with too much frequency, even though they may be adequate otherwise. Take a dictionary - or better, a book of synonyms - and write out a few other choices. Use this list from time to time by way of checking past correspondence and sometimes during actual dictation. The practice

will not only enrich one's vocabulary generally but will help to correct the very bad fault of too much repetition in a given letter.

(d) Take an hour from time to time to read over the letters of others, - particularly letters within the field of one's own correspondence, written by persons with more than average facility. Note the important words and phrases that differ from one's own customary use. Rewrite some of these letters, taking special care to improve the diction where possible.

Improvement in diction does not mean the choice of unusual words. It may mean the elimination of words that may impress the reader as a "play to the grandstand". Simple words of common usage offer ample choice in variety and richness. The need for simplicity should be kept in mind particularly in the large number of our letters addressed to non-technical persons of average, or less than average, education. Simplicity, however, does not require dullness or colorless commonplace. Important words should carry a drive toward the feeling or action desired from the reader.

The reader must constantly be kept in mind. The choice of important key words and phrases involves not only an adaptation of the word to the thought of the writer, but also a reproduction of the thought in the mind of the reader. In addition to their precise meaning, words have overtones. The connotation of a word may vary with different readers, depending upon their education, interest and attitude. A highly technical word that would be an appropriate entry to the thought of a lawyer or engineer, might fail of its purpose with a farmer.

Sample of Poor Diction

The letter on page 35 illustrates a monotonous repetition of certain words, - "specifications", "project", "recommended", "contractor", "consequently". Even in handling simple subject-matter such as that of this letter, there is opportunity for discrimination in diction, particularly in the use of synonyms.

CONCISENESS OF EXPRESSION

A good business letter should contain the fewest possible ideas necessary to carry the central thought and the fewest possible words necessary to express these ideas. There are types of writing in which great elaboration is appropriate. A business letter should have literary merit but it is not written primarily as a contribution to good literature. It is concerned with a single subject of limited range, and usually is intended solely to evoke some immediate action by the reader.

The principle of conciseness applies to the entire letter, to each paragraph and to each sentence. All parts of the letter should be related to the central idea. Some REA letters that I have seen are a jumble of unrelated ideas. Ideas that are irrelevant to the main thought and purpose of the letter should be eliminated. It may be necessary to write two or more letters to the same person at a given period of dictation.

Having reduced the essential ideas to the smallest feasible number, the next task is the expression of these ideas in proper sentence structure. The first requisite of a proper sentence is good grammar. The second and less rigid requisite is the effective grouping of words in accord with certain principles of rhetoric. The general

rules of rhetoric are, of course, beyond the scope of this study, which is concerned only with a few practical matters to which a group of busy people can give more conscious attention in their work. One of these matters is the simple problem of conciseness.

Brevity of sentences is of great importance in business correspondence. One of the most frequent faults in REA letters is a great mass of verbiage that buries the idea of a sentence. Conciseness, however, is not just a matter of few words; it is also a matter of fitting the words together neatly like the parts of a well-oiled machine. Brevity, of course, can be carried to an extreme. A letter should not be a succession of abrupt jerks. It is good rhetoric to mix together sentences of differing lengths.

In sentence structure, as in the choice of words, the writer should always keep working on the mind of the reader; the words should be arranged for him. It is possible to place too much emphasis upon rules and principles. Good writing, like any other artistic expression, must be spontaneous. Conciseness should not be bought at the price of rigidity and stilted form. A sentence has two aspects: the dynamic, which is the idea to be expressed; and the static, which is the form of expression. If the writer has the right intuitive "feel" of his idea, the form of expression will usually take care of itself without much conscious thought of the principles of good sentence structure.

Illustration of the Principle of Conciseness

"This will acknowledge your letter of the 13th instant. My telegram of that date was followed by another asking you to disregard it. The counterpart you had attached to the minutes in question was correct. Sorry to have put you to this extra trouble. Contract returned herewith.

"Wish you would push the registration of your stock as rapidly as possible, and then, after it has been registered and the five stockholders have paid for their stock, there ought to be another meeting of stockholders, ratifying the action of the stockholders' meeting which authorized the execution of the Construction Loan Contract, etc. While the statute provides very definitely (Section 9807, Compiled Statutes, 1929) that upon issuance of the charter there is a corporation with power, etc., nevertheless, such an additional meeting can be held without any special trouble and I believe you will agree with me that it should in order to avoid any question as to proper corporate action. If you will advise me as soon as the stock has been qualified I will send you such a resolution as appears to me should be adopted by the stockholders for the ratification purposes hereinabove set forth."

Comment

The first paragraph carries conciseness to an extreme. It is a jumble of short, jerky sentences, some of which are grammatically incomplete.

The second paragraph goes to the other extreme of sentences that are too long and confused. The essential ideas are hidden in a tangle of phrases, some of which are unnecessary.

The use of the symbol, "etc." should be avoided under

most circumstances and it is particularly inappropriate as used in this context. Sometimes this symbol is a lazy evasion of a detailed enumeration of items that should be given; sometimes (as here) it is an awkward, indefinite surplusage. The word "advise" is much over-worked in REA correspondence; the word "inform" is usually more apt.

Suggested Revision

"My telegram of April 13th requesting that a counterpart of the loan contract be attached to the minutes, was sent, of course, before I had received your letter of that date, enclosing the minutes of your meeting. These minutes were complete and in proper form and I am sorry that my second telegram did not arrive in time to prevent your sending me another counterpart of the loan contract to be attached to the minutes. Since you may wish this extra counterpart for your files I am returning it with this letter.

"Owing to the fact that the meeting authorizing the execution of the Construction Loan Contract was held prior to any issuance of stock, a question might be raised as to the regularity of this meeting and the validity of the action taken. The question is not a serious one since the statute (Section 9807, Compiled Statutes, 1929) seems to provide that a corporation has power to act through its incorporators, as soon as the charter is issued. Although a special meeting would not seem necessary, I think you will agree that the action already taken by the incorporators should be ratified at some future meeting after they have qualified as stockholders.

"The five incorporators should pay for their stock as soon as possible and the stock should then be registered and the certificates issued. When these steps have been taken please inform me and I shall send you a form of resolution to be adopted at the next meeting of the stockholders, ratifying all the action taken at the meeting held on _____. "

CLARITY OF THOUGHT

Clarity is closely related to conciseness but involves certain considerations that require separate treatment. A short, concise letter or sentence is not always clear.

Clarity in the letter as a whole requires a proper relation of all the paragraphs and all the sentences so that the thought proceeds smoothly. A clear letter must start at one point and proceed as directly as possible to the closing point. The intermediate points should be upon a direct line of march. Detours of thought should be avoided. A good, clear letter should be something like a map directing a friend how to arrive at one's home; the important guides should stand out and not be confused by a mass of unnecessary detail.

Clarity in a sentence is the right word and phrase in the right place. Too often it would seem that modifying clauses are thrown into a sentence without any regard as to where they land. The central idea should stand out so prominently that it is easily apprehended by the reader. A second reading should not be necessary.

The best guarantee of clarity of expression is clarity of thought in the mind of the writer. If the writer knows clearly what idea he wants to convey in the letter as a whole and in each sentence, the more mechanical task of expression will be accomplished without heavy effort. A confused sentence is usually a true reproduction of

confused thought. Thorough knowledge of the subject at hand and careful organization of the writer's ideas before beginning to dictate will get every letter off to a good running start. Here again it should be emphasized that the letter must be clear to the reader - not merely clear to the writer - and the particular reader must be kept constantly in mind with each sentence. This requirement need not be a time-consuming burden; after adequate practice and conscious attention it will become an intuitive habit.

Illustration of the Principle of Clarity

The letter on page 48 indicates that clarity is not necessarily promoted by conciseness and brevity. The first paragraph is an attempt to clear up a confusion resulting from the fact that certain letters and telegrams had crossed in transmission. Even though it should be clear to the reader because of his special knowledge of the facts, it would seem puzzling to anyone using the REA files.

Clarity in the first paragraph requires more material and longer sentences. Clarity in the second paragraph requires the elimination of unnecessary phrases and smoother, shorter sentences. In the suggested revision there is also a more logical sequence of thought as an aid to clarity.

COMPLETENESS

In answering a letter, cover everything that is in it. If consideration of certain matters must be postponed in whole or in part or must be referred to others, these facts should be explained. The same requirement of completeness applies to letters that originate with the writer. The central idea should be adequately covered so that no avoidable question marks arise in the mind of the reader. The main issue and each subordinate issue should be met squarely. The letter should not wander off at a tangent. If it is necessary to withhold information or postpone a decision, special care should be taken to prevent any impression of evasion.

One should make final disposition, so far as possible, of every matter included in the letter. The letter should get things ahead just as far as possible. The reader should not have to write back for further instructions or information that could have been included in the prior letter. An analysis of certain REA correspondence shows that weeks of delay have been occasioned by incomplete letters. When a difficult problem is presented on a busy day it is tempting to temporize and to get rid of the matter for the time being by an inadequate

handling. In the long run it will save time to do everything necessary for complete disposal of the matter when it is first presented. This may mean obtaining further facts, consulting with others, or grappling a tough problem with an extra effort of mind and will.

Completeness is not only a problem of the whole letter, it is a problem of each paragraph and each sentence. Clear up everything as you go. Leave no loose ends to plague the reader and later to plague the writer or some other person in REA.

Illustrations of the Principle of Completeness

Most of the sample letters, illustrating other sections of this study, contain also the fault of incompleteness. In the excerpt from the letter quoted at page 6, too much is left to the reader's imagination. Note the additional material in the suggested revision by way of rounding out the thought.

* * * *

The letter on page 10 does not get the matter ahead sufficiently. The desired enlargement of the project is postponed too much to the indefinite future, both by way of the borrower's action and the promised assistance of REA.

* * * *

The letter on page 13 dealing with a rejection of all bids, is incomplete throughout. Each paragraph leaves certain essential matters suspended in the air and the letter as a whole leaves too much to later correspondence.

